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TAGS: PBTS PREL PGOV RS TN MD

SUBJECT: VORONIN PERCEIVES KREMLIN-MFA SPLIT ON MOLDOVA,
WILL UNDO DAMAGE TO HIS TRANSNISTRIAN CBM'S

Classified By: Ambassador Michael D. Kirby for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: In a meeting with the Ambassador on November 30, President Voronin said his meeting with Deputy Secretary of the Russian Security Council Yuri Zubakov produced little forward movement on Transnistria (TN). Instead, the meeting showed Voronin that the Russian MFA and Kremlin seemed divided on Moldova. The President said his Prime Minister's decision to require TN vehicles to register with Chisinau surprised him. Voronin stated he would settle the vehicle-registration issue, acknowledging that the poor timing of the decision had affected his TN confidence-building proposals. The GOM Security Council soon will review the possibility of sending a new contingent of deminers to Iraq. Voronin did not seem opposed to this possibility. End summary.

Little from Zubakov Meeting, Speculation about Kremlin-MFA Split

¶12. (C) President Voronin said that during his meeting with Zubakov the two discussed Zubakov's future visit to Brussels to talk with the EU and U.S. about CFE issues. The President and his Russian visitor also talked about the Russian ban on Moldovan wine, though Voronin understood that Zubakov had little say in this matter.

¶13. (C) Voronin said emphatically that he and Zubakov did not discuss the upcoming OSCE Madrid ministerial, nor the Russian position on the ministerial statement. Voronin was disappointed in Russia's current efforts on drafting the OSCE ministerial statement. The Ambassador noted that, as in previous years, the U.S. preferred no ministerial statement than one that contained unacceptable language. The U.S. would like to find a solution to Russia's threatened withdrawal from CFE, the Ambassador noted, but not at any cost. The Ambassador added that U.S. officials were still working on ideas to civilianize the peacekeeping forces in TN and to remove or destroy munitions stored at Colbasna.

¶14. (C) Voronin stated that Zubakov, as a representative of the Kremlin, did not explicitly mention that the Russian MFA's position today was like that of 2003, when Russia proposed the Kozak Memorandum. However, the President understood that some Russian officials wanted a Kozak-like solution to TN: federalization, TN authority to engage in foreign affairs, and a return to the 1992 peacekeeping accords. (Note: Voronin did not provide further explanation. End note.)

¶15. (C) Voronin shook his head as he concluded: "I don't understand. The position of the Russian MFA doesn't coincide with that of the Kremlin." Voronin related how he tested his hypothesis about this bureaucratic split by noting to Zubakov

that Russian TN negotiator Nesterushkin had made some public statement on the frozen conflict. Voronin got the reaction he expected; Zubakov dismissively asked, "who is this Nesterushkin?" Voronin remarked to us that in other fora Nesterushkin would say that Zubakov had little standing on Moldovan affairs.

Voronin Surprised by Decision to Register TN Vehicles

¶6. (C) The President raised the issue of his government's recent decision to require TN vehicles to be registered with Chisinau authorities. "I found out about this decision on the TV news," Voronin said in exasperation. He asked Prime Minister Tarlev the next morning how the issue had been decided, Voronin recounted. Tarlev responded that TN vehicle registration had been the President's idea for a long time. How long ago did I raise this idea?, Voronin asked Tarlev. "From two years ago" was the response, Voronin said. Voronin said he noted to Tarlev that the Prime Minister had issued this decision in the middle of the President's efforts to reach across to Tiraspol. Voronin said he would find a way to solve the vehicle-registration problem.

¶7. (C) Meanwhile, Voronin said, his government had formed an agricultural committee to consider the distribution of land taking place in Transnistria. Smirnov had decided to rent land for 99 years to three companies that had suddenly appeared in TN, Voronin stated. GOM security services were looking into the companies; Voronin suspected they were Russian. With determination in his voice the President stated that Moldova would not recognize Smirnov's land distribution.

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¶8. (C) Voronin thought TN "foreign minister" Litskai did not have the mandate from TN "president" Smirnov to discuss GOM confidence-building proposals with Minister for Reintegration Sova. Without authority from Smirnov, Litskai was avoiding a meeting with Minister for Reintegration Sova.

Moldovan Contingent to Iraq

¶9. (C) The Ambassador thanked the President for Moldova's contribution to demining efforts in Iraq. Voronin noted that his Security Council would discuss the possibility of sending a new contingent of 20 deminers and 4 others to Iraq this Friday, November 23. Voronin asked whether a group of civilians (e.g., medical personnel) would be needed in Iraq. The Ambassador promised a USG response in time for the Security Council's meeting. (Comment: In a conversation with the Ambassador later on November 20, Minister of Defense Vrabie expressed an interest in sending Moldovan military medical personnel to Iraq. End comment.)

Comment

¶10. (C) Voronin related the details of his Zubakov meeting rather matter-of-factly. The President did not seem particularly optimistic, or pessimistic, for that matter, about a resolution to the Transnistrian conflict. Perhaps, like his advisor Marc Tkaciuk, Voronin feels that the next developments on TN are out of his hands and will come from CFE-related talks with Russia.

¶11. (C) When discussing the TN vehicle-registration issue, Voronin kept his irritation in check. President Voronin, his advisor Tkaciuk and Minister Sova have told us they were surprised by the decision. We assume Prime Minister Tarlev did not have the President's blessing to issue this decision.

¶12. (C) We speculate that Tarlev colluded with Minister of

Information Technology Molojen to issue the vehicle-registration decision. Tarlev recently backed Molojen's decision to require a special stamp on bottled beverages, a decision which would bring revenue to Molojen's Ministry. We cannot determine whether Tarlev and Molojen issued the TN vehicle-registration decision as a way to gain revenue, as a deliberate attempt to undermine the President's efforts to warm relations with Transnistria, or as part of political maneuvering in advance of the March 2008 Communist Party Congress.

¶13. (C) As the pre-2009 electoral season heats up, Transnistria remains frozen.

KIRBY